DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 128 856 CS 501 486

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TITLE Woman's Career Path to Management through Effective Communication.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Business Communication Association (40th, Toronto, Canada, December 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Business Communication; Career Awareness; *Career Planning; *Communication (Thought Transfer); Females; Leadership Qualities; *Management; Management Education; Personnel Management; Womens Education; *Working Women

ABSTRACT

Educators and people in industry are in a good position to educate and train both men and women for management roles. The following points should be emphasized for women preparing to assume managerial responsibilities: appropriate goals must be evaluated and clarified; special leadership skills and appropriate behavior will be expected; adjustment to the business environment will be necessary; managerial abilities need to be improved; effective information exchange must be maintained, keeping in mind the importance of both verbal and nonverbal communication and the three basic communication keys of who, what, and why; human relations must be understood, especially in managing people and in job counselling; and work should be well organized. (JM)

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WOMAN'S CAREER PATH TO MANAGEMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

A Speech Delivered to the 40th Annual and First International American Business Communication Association Convention

Toronto, Canada

December, 1975

BY

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WOMAN'S CAREER PATH TO MANAGEMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

We all hear about Equal Employment Opportunities; we hear about women and how women want to climb the management ladder. But what are we, as educators and people in industry, doing to help women prepare for a career in management? Are we sitting around saying it will take care of itself or are we taking an active part and being part of this new movement?

I take the position that we are in a position to educate and train both women and men for the new role open to women. Yes, I say men, too. Why? Men need to be educated on how to handle this situation, what to expect and how to evaluate a woman, and how to incorporate and implement a program for getting women into the organizational structure.

Goal Clarification

When entering into any new situation, an evaluation and clarification of one's objectives, strengths, and weaknesses in light of what the situation portends are in order. This is especially true for the female entering into the world of business. At this point in time, she is generally the exception and consequently faces a situation that is dominated and controlled by a male-oriented system of values, implied or explicitly stated. Her performance will be measured by male standards, and she will be expected to comply to male-oriented policies. For the female to be successful in this "new" environment, she must have a clear understanding of her purpose, the criteria by which she will be measured, and the rules which will govern her actions.

Women need to know more about decision making and how to communicate with themselves and others. Until recently, many women simply did not know how to make decisions outside the household environment. For example, when thinking about work, we automatically think of men. We assume that men support themselves and, more often than not, a family. In other words, tradition and society have conditioned us to believe that men are raised to work and women are raised to be housewives and mothers. Until recently, it was the unusual woman who contemplated a career. Now, however, more women are having to work -- some because one income is not enough, others to gain identity, and still others because they are divorced, widowed, or have simply chosen a career over marriage.

At some time or other, each of these types of women must sit down and ask, "Why am I working?" or "Why do I want to work?" Such questioning boils down to one question, "Who am I?" -- a question that must be answered by every person entering the world of work. To ignore this question is to eventually experience frustration and a sense of purposelessness.

In determining whether she wants to be a manager, she must also answer questions such as: "What are my personal characteristics?" "Am I a follower or a leader?" If I am a follower now, can I learn to lead?" "What are my interests?" "Can I make the sacrifices required of a manager -- that is, can I give more hours to the company?" "Am I willing to take time from my family and friends?" "Can my husband (if she is married) live with a successful woman?" "Could I relocate in order to advance?" "What are my professional competencies, and am I willing to work to get these competencies if I do not have the required ones now?" How much have I grown as a person in the last year?" A female who truly wants a career as a manager and the opportunities men have traditionally "enjoyed" must be willing to make the same sacrifices as men.

We must work and counsel with our students and employees so they will know what is really ahead of them -- that is, NOT just a glorious no-problem career as a woman manager. We must ask the potential female manager if she is willing to take the responsibilities that go hand-in-hand with being a manager.

Does a Woman Fit into a Man's World?

Once she has analyzed who she thinks she is, she must look at how a woman fits into a man's world. We often forget to talk with our students and employees about this obvious aspect of being a woman manager.

Do we communicate to female trainees some of the pitfalls they may face in this new situation? Do we, for example, discuss appearance, absenteeism, and the need for leadership skills, to mention but three potential pitfalls? We are in the unique position of being able to advise women and help them avoid some of these pitfalls. But do you know what these pitfalls are? If you don't, you will be unable to help.

How about appearance? How many times do we take the time to give guidance in this area? Women are often turned down for a management position on this basis alone. For example, is the potential female manager too much of a woman to succeed in the new job? That is, does she present herself as a package labeled "sex" with verbal and/or body language? Does she wear too much makeup, provocative clothing, large amounts of perfume or inapporpriate styles? Is she careful of personal hygiene? Where is the professionalism in her outward appearance?

Is she a gossip -- always knowing everything -- true or untrue -- and telling it? She must learn to stop gossip, not to cause it to snowball. We can certainly help our students and employees by setting an example and having discussions on the topic. We are often charged with

the responsibility of teaching people to communicate -- this is one time we should be charged with the responsibility of teaching people NOT to communicate.

Can a woman take over and lead or does she just throw her weight around and cause misery? You have the chance to observe how she interacts with others and the opportunity to help her channel her energies in the right direction. She can learn from her mistakes if she takes her job seriously and if you do your job.

Does she cry to get her own way or is she in control enough that if she needs to cry, she can do it in private? Men do not usually cry to get their way and really cannot handle a person who does cry. Can she take constructive criticism or does she always become defensive? Self control is an attribute that a woman must work hard on to have as a characteristic by which she is known

Does she miss a day of work at the drop of a hat? It has been found that men and women miss approximately the same number of days at work. There is only one difference -- women miss a day here and there, and men miss consecutive days. It is far easier to "cover" for a person who misses several days at a time rather than for the hit-miss, single-day person.

Responding to the Business Environment

In the past, most women have worked for a man. Today, men and women must face the possibility of working for a woman. We must encourage a change in attitude in both men and women toward giving the capable woman a chance instead of static. Women are, unfortunately, often times their own worst enemies. For example, there are women who do get ahead but then give a lot of "lip service" about helping other

women rise to the top but never do -- these are the "queen bees" and should be avoided. I encourage you to instill in the women with whom you come into contact not to be queen bees, but rather, supportive individuals. I ask you, how can someone do a good job if the opportunity is not given to them.

I also suggest that we ignore the word prejudice. Do not look for it or generate it -- assume there is none until overt actions prove otherwise. At that point, and only at that point, must she deal with it. For example, she must interact with her peers within the organization and if she is consistently not invited to meetings, she should ask why and request that she be included. Probably, the most important characteristic for her at this point in time is a sense of humor. She may have to win over people who are not always accustomed to having a woman along. In addition to having the sense of humor, she must be sure she does not show expectations that are not commonly extended to a man -- in particular, having someone pay her bill. After all, this is business, and if men feel they have to pay her way, she will not be invited as much. Remember, she is in a man's world. Remember, too, that the relationship between men and women at the management level (really any level) should be kept on as impersonal a level as possible. She may find herself in a lonely situation, being the only female manager, but it is far better than being tarnished with gossip and scandal. She must keep a professional attitude toward others in the organization. She must be self-sufficient and rely on her best friend -- herself.

The other day, a man asked me how I felt about having to deal with men. I responded with, "Well, when dealing with other men..." He stopped me with a laugh, and said, "You have said enough. You equate yourself with men even though you certainly are female and that is what I was

looking for. You gave the answer without ever finishing the sentence and that is the kind of woman we need." So when in the man's world, play the game, fairly and squarely, and remember that we are visiting in the man's world, want to take up residence, and have the task, however right or wrong it may seem, of proving ourselves.

Improving Managerial Abilities

The ability to manage is generally a new and exciting experience for most females. Since it is so new, most women are finding the task stimulating, but often frustrating. They find themselves, because of society's traditions, frequently ill-equipped to handle the situation at the level of competency they feel they should be able to perform activities. Because this is a time of transition, the woman who is now taking up the role of manager, has a double burden upon her shoulders.

There are many things expected of a good manager. Among these are the ability to communicate, to understand human relations in organization, to manage people, to organize work, and to provide on-the-job counselling. The female manager must develop these abilities at two levels. First, she must gain a clear understanding of the techniques employed, and second, she must develop the ability to use them in a male-oriented environment. This second area, the art of management by females, is so new that the full implications are yet as unknown.

Communication

Information exchange is one of the more important forms of communication in an organization. It, like all forms of communication, is a two-way street. The data or idea to be communicated must first be encoded into a message which is then passed on by some media to the receiver who, in turn, decodes the message and takes action. The communication, however,

is not complete until the sender of the data or idea gets feedback from the receiver which indicates the message has been correctly received. The problem faced by the woman manager is simply that it is a woman who initiates the message. Because the manager is female, certain extraneous considerations must be taken into account.

For example, information exchange is more effectively communicated at meetings than by the use of memos. Meetings permit instant communication and the use of intonation and non-verbal communication, such as body language, to assist in the exchange. However, the woman manager, when communicating in this fashion, may find herself at a disadvantage. The male members attending the meeting may misinterpret her intonations (different expressions of excitement, points of inflection, etc.) and the body language she is accustomed to using.

A clever female communicator will always have three basic keys in mind. These are:

1. Who is receiving the communication? How can she, a woman manager, formulate the message so that it will appeal to the receiver on his or her level, and enlist his or her support? This is where listening will prove beneficial. Hearing what a person has to say will better enable the female communicator to understand what people need. This is especially true for the woman manager who must constantly be aware that her messages are coded in a manner which is influenced by the experiences of her male receivers.

2. Why are you communicating? The woman manager must be extremely careful that she is aware of the reasons for and the objectives of her message. She must then be sure that they are clear to others through her message. This can best be done by using words, intonations, and body

language which are impersonal.

3. What do you want to communicate? Be certain what the information is that you want to convey. Be sure it is clear, concise, and free of feminine implications.

Human Relations in Organization

We must encourage the potential woman manager to study the area of human relations. After all, there are no two people alike, and we must at least have basic skills in psychology to better understand how to better work with people. We know that the way we are now has a lot to do with the sum total of our past experiences in life. Also, intertwined in the experiences are our heredity and family backgrounds, our culture, and our social values. All these forces help in making us what we are today.

Managing People

How do we, as educators and employers, instill in the female the ability to manage people. Do we show students and employees they are important by being punctual or do we really say they do not matter -- only our boss matters when it comes to time. Your subordinates like to feel important just as you like to feel important. Another reality about time is that most of us work best early in the day. Why not get in a few minutes early, set a good example, and spend a few minutes getting things done that could take much longer at the end of the day because of tiredness.

Now, how do you manage your students and employees? Good managers use discipline. Lax discipline leads to absenteeism, lateness, lengthy coffee breaks, over-stayed lunch hours, visiting, gossiping, and so on. If you are consistent with your rules, then no employee will question your

intentions. In fact, most employees appreciate firm, predictable and fair discipline. They want to know not only where they stand but also what they can expect of their supervisor or manager. Lax discipline is the greatest waster of time.

Another area which is often neglected is that of what is expected in terms of performance and behavior. Most people really do not know what is expected of them. One way to let them know what is expected is to prepare a job description. This description should be co-written by the superior and the subordinate. It should be specific and agreed on by both parties. Objectives should be listed and ideas on how the tasks should be performed should be clearly stated. Another thing that a woman manager can do is to provide subordinates with information as to what they can expect from the superior and the organization in relation to their work and her relationship with them. The absense of these expectations result in poor performance evaluation and fault-finding. People like to know and need to know what is expected of them.

Finally, employees should be provided with information on how their performance and behavior are perceived by their superior. This is especially true for the woman manager who is, as yet, an unknown identity.

The basic responsibility of evaluating the employee and providing feedback rests with the manager. Very few managers take the time to express their ideas and views and then share this vital information with subordinates. All too often, the easy way is taken, and I ask you -- how can employees or students improve and grow if they are not given an honest, forthright evaluation of where they stand -- especially after they helped establish goals and objectives and are being held responsible for them?

Organizing Work

A worklist can be of inestimable value. The potential woman manager should be taught to make a list of things to be done each day. One proven method is to use separate areas on a piece of paper, numbers, or colors to differentiate priority levels. Then, before leaving work, be sure each item has been acted upon. This "do list" is used by managers in high positions. It pays for them, it will pay for the potential woman manager. Are you making it pay with your students and employees?

Should a manager be interrupted by trivia? Is she afraid of erecting a barrier against interruptions because she is afraid of becoming unpopular or considered self-important? One five minute interruption wastes ten minutes. Perhaps the best solution to this problem is to set aside some time for herself and, in effect, train people to work around her schedule. When they do reach her, they will be more organized and waste less time.

With so much to do, wise managers make the best use of time available. Establish time priorities by asking two simple questions:

1. Which job will provide the greatest benefit if I do it?
2. Which will cause the least harm if I do not do it?

Do not be afraid to delegate. A good manager delegates -- teach those around you to delegate, also. Remember, no one person is indispensable.

On the Job Counselling

Last but not least, we need to discuss the manager's responsibilities for on-the-job counselling. The first thing to remember is that the manager is not qualified to give advice about personal problems. In that situation, the only advice which should be given is to suggest that the

employee seek professional advice. A manager should not put herself in the position where the subordinate could blame her if her advice was wrong. Qualified counselors should be known to which subordinates can be referred. Counselling means listening and what is communicated by listening is really what counts. The good manager cannot become totally involved in a personal problem. A manager can only help subordinates cope with the problem as it exists, not fix blame or find fault with them or their way of life. A manager frequently tells her subordinates to go to the company doctor, the company psychiatrist, etc. I believe it is much better for the subordinate to get help away from the office or school. This reduces the chances that their private lives will interfere with later promotions or become part of the company gossip -- remember -- not only does the counselor have access to your file but many others besides.

A Challenge to Educators and Industry Representatives

So, to you in education and to you in industry, let's make this move up the ladder in management a little easier -- help the woman chart a career path, sharpen her skills, and make her more aware of what is going on around her. Practice what you preach, be a model for others to immulate, and stay in the world of reality. Take a little time to tell someone else what the ropes are and how to go about achieving a goal.